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U.S. shifting to tough plan on terrorism

From Staff and Wire Reports

WASHINGTON — White House and State Department officials said yesterday they were convinced that despite some continuing disputes, the administration was moving closer to the tough policy toward terrorists advocated by Secretary of State George P. Shultz.

They said this could include the swift use of military force, even if it resulted in some civilian deaths.

But the officials acknowledged that although there was now an effort to produce a coherent policy, as yet there was no certainty that in specific terrorist incidents, the Defense Department or the CIA would be ready to take the kind of preemptive or retaliatory military strikes called for by Mr. Shultz in his speech on terrorism in New York Thursday night.

Democratic presidential candidate Walter F. Mondale, meanwhile, charged yesterday that the administration's indecision was encouraging international terrorism.

"You have to be tough about terrorism, but the approach has to be solid and coherent," he said. "Here you have Shultz saying you must attack even if it involves the innocent, you have the president backing away and you have the vice president contradicting the secretary of state. It underscores the fact that no one is in charge and it emboldens the terrorists to call their bluff."

Mr. Mondale said his approach to the terrorism threat would be to "talk, but not negotiate. No concessions."

There was considerable embarrassment yesterday within the administration over the heavy publicity given Friday, with less than two weeks to go in the election campaign, to the seeming contradictions among many senior officials over how to deal with terrorism.

"On the one hand, the contradictions are real," a State Department official said, "because we haven't ironed out every detail. But on the other hand, they're not, because we are going to move against the terrorists. There will be a war on terrorists. You just watch and see."

Officials said that part of the reason for the confusion Friday was that President Reagan and Vice President Bush were on the campaign trail and it was difficult to fine-tune statements with the State Department.

Mr. Shultz's aides said the inspiration for the secretary's speech was his very strong feeling that the administration, despite its many warnings to terrorists, had not been willing to take the kind of decisive actions that would deter or punish terrorists.

Officials said he has privately urged, as he did publicly Thursday, that the United States should be willing, as Israel is, to respond "on a moment's notice" and to strike even though "we may never have the kind of evidence that can stand up in an American court of law."

Aides to Mr. Shultz said that he was particularly critical of the caution shown by Defense Secretary

Caspar W. Weinberger, and by the covert side of the Central Intelligence Agency.

According to White House and State Department officials, Mr. Shultz's principal ally within the administration is Robert C. McFarlane, the White House national security adviser, who, like Mr. Shultz, is a former Marine officer. White House and State Department officials also said that President Reagan, despite some comments to the contrary, basically agrees with the Shultz call for a firmer and less equivocal approach.

West Coast correspondent Muriel Dobbin contributed to this article.